

Par for the Course by Kendra Luehr

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Summary: Billy and Eleven play mini golf.

Par for the Course

A/N: This is a quick side-story to "Changing Winds," but you don't have to read that to understand this one-shot (P.S. I'm sorry for the golf pun). Enjoy!

"Par for the Course"

It had been at least five months since Billy's hospitalization. Amidst his sudden fame, he'd been able to secure an apartment at a fraction of the cost, and all under the guise of heroism. Accepting people's thanks still felt *wrong*. Being lauded was uncomfortable, much like an ill-fitting suit, and yet Eleven had assured him that it was okay to let Hawkins revere him. They needed a hero, and *he* needed to feel wanted.

"I swear, sometimes it's like you're a shrink trapped inside a brat's body." Perching a cigarette between his lips, Billy flicked his lighter and held the flame up beneath the cancer stick, watching Eleven as she grabbed their balls and putters from the clerk.

All at once, her nose wrinkled. "Those are bad!"

"What are?"

"*Bad!*" Plucking the cigarette from his mouth, she threw it to the ground and stomped on it.

"Hey!" If she had been anyone else, he would've flattened her. "What do you care if I smoke?"

Her expression remained pinched, but she only spoke with her eyes. She cared. He didn't have any fucking idea *why*, but Eleven actually *cared*. It was strange. Prior to these five months, he had been nothing but cruel to her and her friends, and yet here she was, making a fuss over something as minuscule as cigarettes.

"No smoking," she reminded him, pointing toward a sign on the vendor's shack.

Billy smiled bitterly. Perhaps she didn't care as much as he thought.

That, at least, made a tiny bit of sense. "Whatever," he muttered. "It's your turn."

Suddenly appearing uncertain, Eleven looked down at their clubs before handing his over. "I've never played before," she admitted. "I only asked you to take me here because...well...Mike said we would come here next week, and I lied and said I already knew how to play."

Billy snorted, suddenly wishing he had his cigarette. "Seriously? You're involving me in your romance with that dumb, candy-assed stick bug?"

"Mike is *not* dumb! Or a stick bug!"

Annoyed, Billy steered her toward the starting point. "Sure, he isn't. Just get into the stance, alright?" Oddly enough, he felt protective of her. He didn't really know Mike that well, but he knew how boys were. "What the hell are you doing?"

"The stance."

Sighing, Billy took hold of Eleven's arms, which were currently raised as though she were brandishing a baseball bat, then gently drew them down so that the ball was aligned with her club. "Try that," he encouraged. "Keep your arms loose and give a gentle tap. And remember to aim for the hole."

Eleven pursed her mouth, then awkwardly swiped at the ball. The club grazed the top, so it went wobbling forlornly to the left.

"Not bad for your first try," Billy said. "I mean yeah, it sucked, but it's not terrible." Setting his own ball onto the green, he got into position, took aim, then gave a gentle swing. The ball rolled in an expertly straight line, then stopped just short of the hole.

Eleven's eyes were wide. "You almost got a homerun!"

Billy chuckled. "I think you meant a *hole-in-one*, but close enough. Why don't you try again?"

Watching as Billy tapped his ball into the hole, she gazed at him

distrustfully, almost as if she mistook his skill for witchcraft.

"What?"

"Are you *sure* you don't still have powers?"

He grinned at that, unwilling to admit that he took pride in her amazement. "What's so hard about believing I have natural skill? *Girls* certainly think so."

"They think you have skills in what?"

"Y'know...stuff." Not wanting to discuss this with *Eleven*, of all people, he impatiently gestured toward the green. "Hurry up. You're holding up the line."

Noting how a group of people were starting to gather behind them, Eleven flushed with acute panic. "B-Billy, I..."

"Relax. We can skip this one and go on to the next hole."

Appearing put off, Eleven gathered her ball and sheepishly followed him on to the next section. "I'm bad at this," she said. "Mike's going to know I lied."

"Girlfriends and boyfriends lie all the time," he said, causing her to regard him curiously. Perhaps he and Max really weren't so different after all.

"Will he be mad?"

"Are you kidding? He'll probably be *glad* you suck, 'cause then he'll get to show off."

"Like you're doing?"

Billy snorted, nudging his shoe against the turf. "It's not showing off if you've got natural-born talent."

Watching him whack the ball, Eleven followed the trajectory with wonder. Just like before, it traveled in a near perfect line down the center, but this time, the ball actually went into the hole on the first

try.

"You're really good," she said. "Did you play with your dad?"

Expression clouding, Billy shook his head. "Nah, he never would've bothered doing something like this. I used to play with my mom."

Eleven squirmed guiltily. "And did you keep playing after she left? I mean, you're still so good..."

"It's your turn," Billy muttered, clearly ending the discussion.

Eleven was immovable. "Was your mom good at mini golf, too?"

"I *said* it's your turn! Jesus!"

Eleven blinked up at him a moment, stunned, before her wide eyes softened and she nodded. As she moved past him to take her position, she gently pressed her hand into the crook of his arm. Billy curled away from the gesture.

After several more holes, Eleven was actually starting to get good. *Really* good, in fact. Billy stood there in disbelief, arching a brow as she got her first hole-in-one.

With an exultant squeal, she threw her arms in the air and began jumping up and down, narrowly missing him with her club.

"Watch it!" he snapped.

Gleeful, Eleven ignored his disdain and grabbed onto his wrist. "C'mon, we've got one more hole!" she exclaimed. "I think I might win!"

Annoyed (and oddly pleased) by her enthusiasm, Billy allowed her to drag him on to the final hole. No one had ever been this happy to be in his company before. Or at least, nobody without an ulterior motive. It made his chest ache and his eyes burn.

Over the outdoor speakers, "Brown Sugar" by The Rolling Stones began playing for the crowd's entertainment. It was an oldie, but one

that Billy had always enjoyed. As Eleven lined up her final shot, he noticed her bouncing along to the beat.

"You like 'Brown Sugar'?"

She looked up at him then, laughing with a confused smile. "Well yeah, of course! Who doesn't? It tastes pretty great in cookies."

Blinking, it took Billy a moment before he chuckled. Perhaps he'd have to educate her about rock music later on.

Eleven reared back with her club, swung gently, and then pouted when the ball stopped just short of the hole.

"Go ahead and knock it in," Billy said.

Not needing to be told twice, Eleven moved over to the traitorous ball, then clipped it into the hole.

"Not bad. You just might beat me," Billy told her. In truth, he hadn't been keeping score.

Heading over to line up his shot, he loosely swung his arms a moment, then finally hit the ball. It moved in its typically perfect, straight line, and then...

Whack!

With a sharp veer to the left, the ball avoided the hole and careened wildly off into the siding.

Billy looked to Eleven in disbelief, only to catch her quickly wiping blood from her nose.

"Hey... *Hey!* You cheated!" By her own admission, Eleven had told him she no longer had her powers, so what had happened?

Catching his questioning look, she grinned. "I got them back!"

"Hmph, so I see. And at *my* expense, no less."

"You were going to lose anyway." Beaming, she picked up their balls

and gestured toward a nearby concession stand. "The loser buys the winner ice cream."

Billy huffed, though he nodded. "Fine. You're lucky I have a sweet tooth."

Grinning in triumph, Eleven hummed to herself as she went off to return their balls and putters.

After ordering two ice cream cones – a twist for Eleven, and a vanilla for himself – Billy sank down onto a nearby bench and waited for his young friend to join him.

"Looks like the stick bug will be creamed, after all," he teased.

Eleven bristled. "Stop calling him that! What even *is* a stick bug?"

"A bug that looks like your boyfriend."

Childishly sticking out her tongue, she rolled her eyes before returning to her ice cream. A moment of silence passed before she grudgingly mumbled, "Thank you for taking me out here today. I know you'd rather be at the pool."

Billy shrugged, idly licking his cone.

"Maybe we can do more stuff like this? In a week or two?"

"I don't think so, kid."

"Why not?"

He hesitated, then looked down at her with a ruefulness that she found alarming.

"Why not?" she asked again.

Gazing back out over the vibrant, brush-stroked horizon, Billy sighed through his nose and shrugged. "I'm going back to California."

Eleven's stomach dropped. "What? When?"

"I dunno, but soon. I'm working out the arrangements with my new

landlord."

"Oh..." Eyes downcast, she began to toe the sidewalk at their feet. Finally, she asked him, "Are you not happy here?"

The soft, defeated tone to her voice caused Billy to anxiously jiggle his foot. "Not really, no..." He shrugged. "These past five months have really opened my eyes – *you've* opened my eyes – but it's like only one of the holes in my heart has been plugged. Staying here in Hawkins can't keep me from hemorrhaging, El."

"I understand."

He looked down at her then, somehow believing that she *did* understand. As different as they were in thought, temperament, and reactions, they had both suffered similar abuse. Over the past several weeks, she had told him about "Papa" – about how he'd hurt her and almost destroyed her chance at a normal, happy childhood. It bothered Billy that he could never reciprocate. He didn't feel *safe* telling her everything, but Eleven was patient and never forced it out of him. She knew the gist of it all anyway, and still she remained his friend.

"Will you write to me?"

"What, like a pen pal?"

When Eleven nodded, Billy shrugged and sourly finished his ice cream. "Sure, I guess..." They both knew he probably wouldn't.

Suddenly without an appetite, Eleven tossed her cone into the neighboring trashcan. "Do you think you'll come back to visit?" Her voice was soft and small.

Carefully weighing his words, Billy shrugged again and leaned back in his seat. "Yeah, sure."

Eleven flashed him a tearful smile. "Friends don't lie, Billy."

"Yeah..." He mirrored her sad smile. "I guess they don't."

Trying to mask the tears in her eyes, Eleven laid her head down on

his shoulder and curled into his side. With a lump in his throat, Billy lifted a large, shaking hand before setting it against the back of her head. He had never touched her before – he'd never wanted to. But with the sun bleeding out into the horizon, and the quietly weeping girl at his side, he suddenly realized that he was loved. Hawkins could never be his home – not when California was his heart – but somehow, one little girl had made it come painfully close.

A/N: Ahhh. *hides* Admittedly, I hadn't planned on writing a side-story to "Changing Winds," but you all were so nice, and so supportive, and I was just completely floored by how sweet and welcoming everyone was! I've been writing for a teeny-tiny fandom for the past several years now (*Hannibal*), so I really wasn't expecting even half of the feedback I got. With that said, I was a little reluctant to try for more since the tone of this is so different (especially since it's implied that Billy's grown so much, so I was worried he'd seem OOC), and yet I'm glad I went for it. This was a lot of fun for me, and I hope you enjoyed reading it as much as I enjoy writing it. And THANK YOU!

P.S. If you wish to read my **historical romance novel**, you can find it on my Tumblr, [musicboxmemories](#)!